

MILITARY WORKING DOGS

Protecting, defending, supporting Elmendorf's force protection battle

By Senior Airman Connie L. Bias
3rd Wing Public Affairs

Like the rest of us, Ben has a morning routine.

He stretches and yawns. He eats and gets ready for work. Then Ben heads out to pull his duties with the 3rd Security Forces Squadron — duties that include securing base gates, searching for suspicious items and patrolling. When he's not beating the streets, he's training.

Ben is a military working dog, one of six assigned to Elmendorf, and a valuable force protection tool.

"The dog offers a higher degree of protection than we could get from a single person," said Tech. Sgt. Samuel Peters, kennel master. "The force multiplier is almost immeasurable. The dog's senses are much greater than yours or mine. I've seen dogs find a person from across a wooded area or a field from up to 500 yards. From that distance, you can hardly see a person, but the dog can smell them. And it takes the dog maybe a minute to search that area using scent, whereas it might take a person two to three hours using sight and sound."

To guide those keen senses, dogs go through daily obedience and proficiency training.

"For the basic obedience training, there are certain efficiencies the dog always has to have," said Staff Sgt. William Ping, military working dog patrolman, and Ben's handler. "For instance, the dog has to sit, stay or lay down, or be able to stay where he's at when you walk away."

Just like Air Force enlisted members, dogs begin their careers at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas. They're purchased from vendors around the world and shipped to Lackland, where they begin training to search for explosives and narcotics. Once the dogs have met standards at Lackland, they're sent to different bases and paired with handlers for continued training.

"They start the basic training all over again, with a team concept," said Ping. "You have to build a 'one dog, one handler' concept once the dog gets to a base."

When the dog trainer and kennel master feel the dog and handler team is ready to work, the team goes through an evaluation and certification process.

"At that point, after certification, the dog is ready to perform his duties on the road as a K9 team member," said Ping.

This entire process, starting with the purchase of the dog, takes an average of three to four months. But the dog isn't hidden from sight during



PHOTOS BY AIRMAN 1ST CLASS JOE LAWS

(Clockwise from top) Military working dog Ben attacks Staff Sgt. Jennifer Bocconcelli, military working dog trainer, during a training exercise. Staff Sgt. Joel Ewing, military working dog patrolman, gives his dog Arko a treat after a successful vehicle search at the Muldoon Gate. Staff Sgt. William Ping, military working dog patrolman, prepares to conduct a training search.

this time. While dogs can't perform legal searches before they're certified, they can still patrol.

"A dog comes with a certain amount of psychological deterrence," said Peters. "A police officer, quite frankly, isn't going to bite a person if they don't listen, whereas that dog is going to do just that. The dog demands that respect, so just having the dog visible is a big deterrence factor."

That visibility can quickly turn into action if the patrolman runs into a problem. When a patrolman comes across a suspicious person, he will initiate a challenge.

"The patrolman basically tells the person to stop where they are, identify themselves, walk towards the patrolman and that sort of thing," said Peters.

If the person is uncooperative or runs, the patrolman will release the dog.

"We announce that we're going to release the dog before we do it, to give the person an opportunity to stop and listen to us," said Ping. "If they don't, the dog will chase and attack the person."

If the suspicious person cooperates with the patrolman, the dog won't be released, but will serve as an over-watch during a search.

Dogs also help with car searches, particularly at base gates.

"Since the events of Sept. 11, we've been doing a lot more detection searching," said Peters. "The dogs are at the gates at random, and there's always a dog available and on call if anything suspicious comes up. And we're everywhere. We're on the flightline, we search aircraft, we patrol housing areas; we're all over the base."

On-call duties, vehicle searches and daily training add up to a busy schedule for the dogs and handlers. Add that to the fact that handlers have to feed and bathe the dogs, take them to the vet and deal with anything else that comes up, and you have more than a full-time job.

The handlers are all volunteers; no one is forced into the duty. Peters even gave up an earlier assignment to Elmendorf just to be a dog handler, not knowing if he'd have the chance to be sta-

tioned here later.

"When I volunteered for this job at 18, coming right out of high school, I had just gone through the Security Police Academy, and I was going to be based here," said Peters. "To volunteer for K9 meant you lost your orders. I had always wanted to come to Alaska, but I wanted to be a dog handler."

Ping's love for animals led him to volunteer, and he said the close relationship he and Ben share is almost indescribable.

"It's like having a kid with me. You get attached to your dog just like you would any other person."

"A lot of times, a handler isn't with another person," added Peters. "That dog is your partner; you depend on each other."

As valuable weapons in the battle of force protection, Elmendorf depends on them too.



5 Elmendorf airmen receive Article 15s

This week the *Sourdough Sentinel* re-introduces the publishing of Article 15s. To serve the interest of military justice and our readership, summaries of administrative actions will appear on a regular basis.

The following Article 15s were completed by the 3rd Wing Staff Judge Advocate Nov. 26-30.

Under-age drinking

■ An airman 1st class assigned to the 3rd Civil Engineer Squadron consumed alcohol under age, crawled through a dorm room window and touched a woman’s cheek.

He received a reduction to the grade of airman, forfeiture of \$250 pay for two months, and 45 days of extra duty.

AWOL

■ A senior airman assigned to the 3rd Civil Engineer Squadron was absent without leave for four days.

E-mail address for pay issues

RANDOLPH AIR FORCE BASE, Texas — Airmen who can’t reach the Air Force Personnel Center Contact Center are asked to e-mail their issues to afpc.dpsfm@afpc.randolph.af.mil.

Increased phone calls have caused some customers to wait on hold for 30 minutes or more.

“We’re sorry people are having trouble getting through,” said Lt. Col. David Zeh, chief of the AFPC Contact Center. “With limited phone lines, our operators are working as diligently as possible.

“(Local) finance offices should be their first avenue,” he said. “But if people do call the contact center and get a busy signal, they’re certainly encouraged to try again later or send an e-mail.”



He received a reduction to the grade of airman 1st class, forfeiture of \$250 pay for two months, and 45 days of extra duty.

Report for duty

■ An airman 1st class from the 3rd Equipment Maintenance Squadron failed to report for duty and was one-and-a-half hours late.

He received a suspended reduction to the grade of airman and 20 days of extra duty.

■ An airman from the 732nd Air Mobility Squadron failed to report for duty and was more than one hour late.

He received a reduction to the grade of airman basic and a suspended forfeiture of \$243 pay.

Lawful order

■ An airman 1st class from the 3rd Security Forces Squadron failed to obey a lawful order to remain in his quarters and destroyed government property by damaging the front door of Bldg. 7113. The damage totaled \$335.

He received a suspended reduction to the grade of airman and forfeiture of \$250 pay for two months.

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Injured servicemembers receive Purple Heart

By Master Sgt. Joe Bela
U.S. Air Forces in Europe Public Affairs

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — Four of the five U.S. servicemembers injured during a prison uprising in Afghanistan were presented Purple Hearts Dec. 1 at Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center in Germany.

The four soldiers and one airman, identified only by rank and first name, are members of the elite U. S. Special Forces. They were wounded Nov. 26 during a three-day battle with armed Taliban members who were being detained in Quala-i-JanGi, a fortress located about 10 miles west of Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan.

Army Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Lambert, commanding general of U.S. Army Special Forces Command at Fort Bragg, N.C., presented the soldiers — Capt. Kevin and Paul; 1st Sgt. David; and Sgt. 1st Class Paul — with their medals during a brief ceremony attended by international media. All four men are Green Berets assigned to the 5th Special Forces Group (Airborne), Fort Campbell, Ky.

“They paid a price in blood here,” Lambert said. “They have given their blood in the war against terrorism.”

The fifth injured servicemember, Air Force Staff Sgt. Mike from the 23rd Special Tactics Squadron at Hurlburt Field Air Force Base, Fla.,

opted to have his Purple Heart presented to him among family and friends at his home station.

The men sustained injuries ranging from abrasions to ruptured eardrums and broken bones when a U.S. bomb inadvertently struck near their position during the battle.

Recalling the events that led to the friendly fire incident, Capt. Paul said they were part of an 11-man element sent to assist the northern alliance when the uprising began.

“Northern alliance forces were sustaining heaving casualties during the uprising. On the morning of Nov. 26, we arrived at the fortress,” he said. “Three of us, Sgt. Paul and Sgt. Mike and I, made our way up to the top of a wall where we started receiving some direct small-arms fire and also some mortar fire.

“We needed some backup so 1st Sgt. Dave and Capt. Kevin also made their way up to the roof to assist us; (they also) ran into some fire,” he said. “We realized that even though we could see the Taliban, we weren’t going to be able to do much good because of the fire we were receiving.”

The team eventually made its way to a new position, but Taliban forces struck again, Capt. Paul said.

“There was machinegun fire and mortar rounds were landing all around us,” he said.

The team established communications with fighter aircraft in the area



MASTER SGT. JOHN P. SNOW

Air Force Staff Sgt. Mike, one of five elite Special Forces servicemembers injured in Afghanistan, is interviewed at Landstuhl Army Regional Medical Center in Germany.

and directed them to the target, Capt. Paul said. The fighters began to make their run, and the next thing they knew, they were flying through the air.

“It took me about a second to realize what had happened,” said Staff Sgt. Mike, the mission’s combat controller and ground link between the aircraft and the ground units.

“There was a flash and the next thing I know, I’m airborne,” he said. “I hit the ground and stayed there for about a second or so to make sure I had all my body parts.”

“It was a weird feeling, to say the least,” said Capt. Paul. “I remained conscious the whole time.”

Unable to move because his left leg was pinned behind his torso when he hit the ground, Capt. Paul waited until 1st Sgt. Dave appeared.

“I went over to him, and he was saying something like ‘I can’t move; I can’t move.’ First thing, though, I had to find a weapon,” said 1st Sgt. Dave. “We’d been blown forward off the wall of the fortress. My weapon was there in front of me, and, then, all of a sudden, I’m lying there on the ground with no weapon.

“I realized I had all my body parts, and I got up. I found a weapon, grabbed it, and then I moved to (Capt. Paul),” he said.

“He said he couldn’t move, but I said he was going to move because we were (exposed) and could have gotten engaged by the Taliban. I got him up and started talking to him. I pushed him up the wall, and then the northern alliance guys felt we ran out of gas toward the top and (helped),” he said.

“Reconsolidate your accountability. That’s my job, and I was out there to make sure we got everybody back,” said 1st Sgt. Dave. “You have to keep your wits about you when everything around you is just going crazy. It’s like everyone says, in a chaotic condition, you go back to the training that you’ve had. If you train

...see **Purple Heart**, Page 7

Purple Heart: Servicemembers receive medal

...continued from Page 6

hard, it’s going to pay off in time of war or in time of stress.”

Eventually, the men gathered and realized one was missing: Capt. Kevin. They found him lying down at the base of a wall.

“He was further out than where we’d been,” said Capt Paul. “He was just lying on the ground; he wasn’t moving. It looked really serious.”

A Quick Reaction Force soon arrived to evacuate and treat the injured. The men were flown by helicopter to a nearby field hospital for initial treatment. Eventually, an Air Force C-9 Nightingale from the 75th Airlift Squadron brought the injured to Germany from Turkey.

Although the men have an appre-

ciation for the recognition that comes with a Purple Heart, most would trade the decoration for not having had the experience in Afghanistan.

“I don’t want to sound cynical, but it would be a lot nicer if I got my hearing back; it would be a lot nicer if I could walk without a cane. It would be a lot nicer if our friend Kevin weren’t confined to a wheelchair. That would be a lot better than a Purple Heart,” said Capt. Paul.

“We had a job to do; we went and did it. We all know that there’s a cost associated with our job,” he said.

“But, when you think of what those guys did at D-Day — storming the beaches; when you think of (how) the Marines suffered at Khe Sanh. We think about it; are we as deserving as them?”

Sgt. 1st Class Paul also had reservations about receiving the decoration.

“It’s kind of hard to really put it together. I’m not sure as far as whether we deserve it or if it’s warranted,” he said. “Personally, the thousands of people who from 70 different nations died unexpectedly on Sept. 11 (during the terrorist attacks in the United States), I think they are more deserving.

“But, I’ll tell you, we were in a fire fight — no one doubts that,” he said. “We were all wounded. I’m just going to let everyone make their own determination of whether we deserve it or not.”

Despite their brush with the reality of war, the men say they have no regrets.

“The president said from the start that there’s going to be a cost involved in this war against terrorism,” Capt. Paul said. “Fortunately, we’re going to recover from our injuries; hopefully, we’ll be back there in the fight. We need to eradicate terrorists and the organizations and the governments that sponsor terrorists.”

“We’ve taken fire and traveled through the Afghan mountains on horses. The circumstances were not (good). Sometimes, you (ask yourself), ‘What are we doing here?’ Then, you draw on the patriotism you see at home and realize why you’re doing what you do,” said Staff Sgt. Mike. “I just remember the people with the flags — the police officers and the firemen. That’s what this whole mission’s about.”

Rumsfeld praises coalition efforts against terror

By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — Once the Taliban and Al Qaeda network in Afghanistan are dealt with, the United States has only a humanitarian interest in the country, Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said to Pakistani reporters.

Rumsfeld praised Pakistani Chief Executive Gen. Pervez Musharraf for making a courageous decision to support the coalition against terrorism.

“With the power of weapons today and the dangers that those weapons pose, the problem of global terrorism becomes more acute and danger-

ous,” he said. “I think that Pakistan and the leadership there (have) made a significant contribution in their vocal and public position they’ve taken as a member of the coalition.”

He said the United States has no territorial aims in the region. “Our only interest in Afghanistan is to deal with Al Qaeda and to deal with the leadership in Afghanistan so there is a stable, broadly based government,” he said. “Then it’s up to the Afghan people. It is not up to us to decide.”

Rumsfeld said the worldwide coalition against terrorism is making headway. He told the Pakistanis that the offensives on the financial, diplomatic, law enforcement and military fronts are

paying off, but that the process will take time.

Rumsfeld said the cooperation has limited the choices open to Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders. No country now recognizes the Taliban as the leaders of Afghanistan.

“The places terrorists can go have been reduced,” Rumsfeld said. “Many countries are trying to block their borders, many countries are being careful about who comes into their countries from Afghanistan. All of which, I think, is to the good. It brings us closer to our goal. But until we reach our goal of actually capturing the senior Al Qaeda leadership and tearing up these terrorist cells around the world, it still remains ahead of us.”

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Seasonal offerings

Services patrons get deals on child care, food, more

By Mary M. Rall
3rd Services Marketing

It may be the thought that counts when giving a gift, but sometimes it's hard to be enthusiastic. After all, tube socks are still tube socks.

That's why the 3rd Services Squadron is offering a wide variety of activities this year that are sure to please even the pickiest of receivers.

Christmas just wouldn't be the same without Santa, and the Youth Center puts him front and center Dec. 22 from 10 a.m. to noon at its annual Breakfast with Santa. The price is just \$6 per person and \$12 per family. Tickets can be purchased through Dec. 14, and the breakfast will include eggs, bacon, sausage, toast, French toast, milk, juice and coffee. So come out and join the fun and take away memories you can cherish.

Anyone wishing to add some elegance to their holiday meal can enjoy the Christmas Brunch Dec. 23 from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the Susitna Club. Treats for the entire family will be featured, with a special something for the little ones. Adults are \$11.95, youth 6-12 are \$4.95, and children under 6 are free. Non-member adults please add \$3.

Parents can get a stress-free jump on the busy holiday shopping season by enjoying the convenience of a special Last Minute Shopping Give Parents a Break Dec. 15 from 1-5 p.m. at the Denali CDC. For those enrolled in the program, all required paperwork and shots



MARY M. RALL

Instructor Sondra Kaplan teaches a variety of classes this holiday season at the Skills Development Center to help students create gifts that come from the heart.

must be turned in and current prior to the day of childcare. There is a \$3 per hour, per child fee, and reservations must be made by Thursday. To make reservations or for more information, call 552-8304.

Those inclined to make their own holiday gifts can create presents that come straight from the heart by taking advantage of a number of classes featured at the Skills Development Center. Holiday craft classes will include a Santa Mask Drybrushing class today from 7-9 p.m. for \$25; a Holiday Stamping Fun class Saturday from noon to 3 p.m. and Thursday from 6-9 p.m. for \$20; a Large Santa Platter class Wednesday from 6-9 p.m. for \$35; and a Snowman

Cookie Plate class Dec. 14 from 7-9 p.m. for \$25.

People who need a break from the stressful and seemingly endless shopping can enjoy a night out and give someone a helping hand by participating in the Polar Bowl's Christmas Canned Food Drive Wednesday and Dec. 19. By bringing in three cans of non-perishable food, participants can receive a free game, with a three-game limit.

Services will continue to present new and exciting opportunities for fun throughout the new year. Regardless of the time of year or occasion, there will always be something for you to tear into, and we guarantee there will be no tube socks involved.

YOUNG ARTISTS: Enjoy the work of the artists of the future as the local Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the School Age Program and the Youth Center feature an Art Exhibit at the Susitna Club. Judging will take place at 5 p.m., and everyone in the community is invited. 753-3131

MOVIE: *The Others* (PG-13). Nicole Kidman stars as Grace, a woman raising two children by herself in a creepy mansion as she waits for her husband to return from war. 7 p.m.

► sat

VENUS DREAMS: Stop by the Community Center and get the kinks out of your game by practicing with the new tennis ball pitching machine. With a capacity of 150 balls, the pitching machine is a worthy partner that will never wear out.

MOVIE: *The Others* (PG-13). See Friday. 7 p.m.

► sun

BOOK WORM: The base library is open from noon to 5 p.m. to help you meet all of your research needs. With seemingly countless books to choose from, as well as the Internet for a resource, you're sure to find the source to complete every project.

MOVIE: Theater closed.

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PRICE SLASHER: You'll see a big difference in your spending when you present your Services card at most Services facilities throughout the base to receive a 10 percent discount on various features and fees. For information or to become a club member, call 753-3131.

CASH OUT: Log on to www.elmendorfservices.com and search the links for a hidden animated \$50 bill and specially marked bonus prizes throughout the month. The first person to find the dancing \$50 bill will win \$50 cash, and those who find the bonus prizes can win anything from ski passes to bowling certificates. Winning dates vary monthly, so log on often.

► inside the fence

Super Friday, today at 5:30 p.m. at the Kashim and Susitna Clubs. **753-6131**

Give Parents a Break, today from 7-11 p.m. at the Denali CDC. **552-8304**

Santa Mask Drybrushing, today from 7-9 p.m. for \$25 at the Skills Development Center. **552-2470**

Holiday Stamping Fun, Saturday from noon to 3 p.m. for \$20 at the Skills Development Center. **552-2470**

Basic Sign I, Saturday from 3-5 p.m. for \$30 at the Skills De-

velopment Center. **552-2470**
Kids Korner Crafts, Saturday from noon to 2 p.m. for \$15 at the Skills Development Center. **552-2470**

Katmai Parent Representative Meeting, Monday at 5 p.m. at the Katmai CDC. **552-5113**

Denali Parent Representative Meeting, Tuesday at 5 p.m. at the Denali CDC. **552-8304**

Large Santa Platter, Wednesday from 6-9 p.m. for \$35 at the Skills Development

Center. **552-2470**
Christmas Canned Food Drive Bowling, Wednesday at the Polar Bowl. **552-4108**

Nativity Arabian Horse, Thursday from 6-9 p.m. for \$25 at the Skills Development Center. **552-2470**

Holiday Stamping Fun, Thursday from 6-9 p.m. for \$20 at the Skills Development Center. **552-2470**

Snowman Cookie Plate, Dec. 14 from 7-9 p.m. for \$25 at the Skills Development Center. **552-2470**

Sept. 11, Dec. 7 linked in American history

National tragedy unifies country, generations

By **Jim Garamone**
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON — In the days immediately after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in New York, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania, Americans groped to find adequate ways to describe the event.

Time and again, commentators, politicians and just plain folks called the attacks “another Pearl Harbor.”

Today marks 60 years since the Japanese attack on the main bastion of American strength in the Pacific. The attack precipitated America’s entry into World War II. On Dec. 8, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress to declare war on Japan. He called Dec. 7 “a date that will live in infamy.”

Sept. 11 and Dec. 7 are now linked in the public consciousness, though the attacks on those days aren’t that similar, save their furtiveness.

On Dec. 7, 1941, the nation of Japan attacked military bases on the then-remote U.S. territory of Hawaii, killing more than 2,500 people, mostly military members, and wounding thousands more.

On Sept. 11, 2001, Al Qaeda — an amorphous, stateless terrorist network — hijacked four U.S. commercial airliners and used them to attack targets in two mainland cities, killing some 4,000



people, mostly civilians.

What the two events have in common, however, is the galvanizing response of the American people.

After Pearl Harbor, Americans swamped recruiting stations seeking to enlist. Others calmly waited for draft notices. Still others went back to their jobs and began the work that would make the United States “the Arsenal of Democracy.”

The country was unified. Before Dec. 7, Roosevelt couldn’t have gotten a declaration of war through Congress on a bet. After Dec. 7, only one representative voted against the declaration. When Germany and Italy, Japan’s allies, declared war on the United States days later, the conflict escalated into the first truly global war in the history of mankind.

The American generation that struggled through the Depression stepped forward to save the world. Americans hadn’t started the war, but they knew how to end it, knew exactly where to go

and who to thrash.

After the attacks of Sept. 11, Americans felt unity. They displayed that solidarity by flying the flag, donating more than a billion dollars to help victims’ survivors and aid groups, and showing support for the nation in many other ways.

They felt as did President Bush, who, visiting the Pentagon shortly after a hijacked airliner had hit the building, told photographers, “I’m sad, but I’m angry, too.”

But there was also frustration: The enemy is stateless yet state-supported and is nontraditional and unconventional. America’s typical responses were not options.

In his Sept. 20 speech to Congress, Bush said, “We are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done.”

Polls show the American people support the actions of the government to date. Support for military action in Afghanistan to destroy Al Qaeda terrorists and their sympathetic Taliban government hosts is also high. These same polls show Americans are willing to be patient in going after terror groups.

Dec. 7 and Sept. 11 may have another thing in common: They are dates when the world changed.

“Dec. 7 was a turning point for the world and Sept. 11 should be no less so,” Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz said Nov. 14 in a speech. “On 9-11, our generation received one of history’s greatest wakeup calls. Like the ‘Greatest Generation,’ we must answer that call. As we do, we have the chance to make sure that the world that emerges will be better for our efforts.”

Winter sports: Injury stats slide upward

By Staff Sgt. Robert C. Trabue Jr.
3rd Wing Safety

With a carpet of hardened snow on the ground and a winter chill in the air, people have broken out skis, snowboards and sleds to pursue their favorite winter sports.

As a direct correlation, we have seen injury statistics climb in both the overall and reportable mishap categories from these winter activities. Injuries have been as severe as fractured bones, and as benign as scrapes and bruises.

Following a few safety tips will

make your winter outing enjoyable and safe, instead of a prelude to an emergency room visit.

The object of skiing, sledding or snowboarding is to go down a hill. But remember that the first hill you see is not always the best hill to conquer. It's best to go to a controlled area that has been designated for winter activities such as sledding and skiing.

However, if you choose an uncontrolled area, survey the area to make sure it's safe. Snow covers what was previously visible on the ground, and harmless mounds of

snow could be large rocks, or even ditches filled with loose snow. Those dangers, if encountered while skiing or falling, could result in pain or disaster. Make sure your path is free of harmful debris.

Despite the enthusiasm associated with getting on the slopes, it is important to stay within your skill level. Don't attempt maneuvers beyond your limits or the limits of the equipment. Also, beginners should take lessons from a ski or snowboard instructor to learn proper techniques and minimize injury.

Learn how to properly fit boots

and bindings, and the proper way to break a fall. Avoid jumping until you are more experienced, and when starting off, start small and work your way up.

Injuries are more likely to occur if you are tired, so remember to rest if you're fatigued.

With any change of season, there are activities to enjoy. Along with these activities there is the potential for mishaps, so don't forget to check your gear, wear proper clothing and, most importantly, have the right equipment and the knowledge to make it fun!

Military character vital to America's wars

By Lt. Col. John E. Stuwe
5th Operations Support Squadron

MINOT AIR FORCE BASE, N.D. — As members of the U.S. Air Force, we have all solemnly sworn to support and defend the U.S. Constitution and faithfully perform our duties.

Such a tremendous responsibility demands individuals with strong character — character that all who wear the uniform take great pride in.

Our character is defined by our distinctive moral beliefs, ethical strengths and clear values.

In his book, "The Greatest Generation," Tom Brokaw wrote that the World War II generation was the greatest because of their values of personal responsibility, duty, honor and faith.

I have spoken at several veterans' functions, and a favorite recurring theme of mine is that our

airmen today still believe very strongly in these same values.

Today's all-volunteer force is manned with fine men and women who defend America every day — they "stand beside her and guide her" to preserve our precious freedom.

The tragic events of Sept. 11 have brought about a tremendous resurgence in patriotism. Old Glory is flying everywhere as all of America reassesses what it means to live free of fear.

I'm glad to see this upwelling of support for our country and especially for all of our armed forces.

Americans have responded to the tragedy in many ways, including rethinking their personal values. In many ways, they are reexamining their moral and ethical beliefs: that it is our responsibility to take care of one another, to always do the

right thing and honor and respect one another.

The tragedy has also forced many to simply reflect on how fortunate we are to live in the United States of America.

Personal responsibility, duty and honor are all values that define the character of an American warfighter.

We remain the finest military in the world because of the high ethical standards that are set and maintained by our men and women in uniform. All of us share a great pride in our country and are prepared to do whatever it takes to ensure freedom prevails.

In this time of national tragedy, Americans have reflected on their own values and have rekindled the patriotic spirit, a patriotic spirit that servicemembers feel every day as they do their duty and bring honor to our great nation.